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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of appearance on leadership processes by examining the effect of attractiveness on the actual performance of a leadership task. College students (N=62) performed a simulation task in which they played the role of a candidate for student government president. All the students were videotaped, giving a prepared speech of approximately 30 seconds (followed by enough blank tape to fill out a minute) to create a campaign commercial to be shown across the campus. Three groups of 20 students each were created by discarding two of the subjects at random with each group having the part of the videotape appropriate to that group. These three 20-minute videotapes were presented without sound to groups of the original subjects for judgment of each subject's performance and to a group of experimenters for judgments of each subject's appearance. Comparative analysis of ratings revealed a significant positive correlation between appearance and performance ratings. References are included. (TE)

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Physical Attractiveness and Judged Suitability for Leadership

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Current theories of leadership emphasize the importance of the attribution of leadership traits and leaderlike behaviors in the relationship between leader and followers. Evidence regarding the stereotypes that are widely held of physically attractive individuals suggests that attractiveness may play a significant role in such attributions. Attractive individuals are believed to possess more socially desirable and more leaderlike traits and to be more successful (Miller, 1970; Dion, Berscheid, and Walster, 1972).

Previous research has found that appearance is related to leader emergence (Efran and Patterson, 1974; Mazur, Mazur, and Keating, 1984; Turns, Wilderman, and Cherulnik, 1986). The present study was undertaken to examine more directly the influence of appearance on leadership processes by investigating the impact of attractiveness on the actual performance of a leadership task. It was hypothesized that more attractive college students would be better able to convince others of their suitability for leadership in a simulation of an appeal for support in a campus political campaign.

Method

The subjects were college students recruited from introductory psychology classes who received extra credit toward their course grades for participating. Sixty-three subjects

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performed a simulation task in which they played the role of a candidate for student government president. They videotaped a prepared speech of approximately 30 seconds to create a campaign commercial to be shown across the campus. The task was explained in written instructions. After they consented to participate (none declined), they rehearsed the speech for two minutes before entering a studio to record it. One subject withdrew from the study at this point. Subjects stood at a podium 10 feet from the camera. Cue cards were placed to the subject's left of the camera to be used as needed. The experimenter sat farther to the subject's left and looked down throughout the speech.

The videotapes of subjects' performances were edited into one-minute segments containing the speech and enough blank tape to fill the minute. Three groups of 20 target persons each were created by discarding two of the subjects at random. These three 20-minute videotapes were presented without sound to groups of the original subjects for judgments of target persons and their performances and to a group of experimenters for judgments of targets' appearance.

Groups of 12, 12, and 6 subjects returned to view tapes 1, 2, and 3, respectively. They were given booklets containing separate forms for the 20 target persons. The forms contained a checklist with 12 trait adjectives from which subjects chose six to describe each target person. The adjectives were chosen from those scaled for favorability by Anderson (1968), for their relevance to leadership (see Table 1 for the adjectives and their favorability scale values). The form also contained four Likert-

type rating scales on which subjects indicated their agreement with each of the following statements about the target person: "They look like a leader," "They seem to feel comfortable," "They are attractive," and "They look competent." Subjects responded during the one minute that each target person's performance was shown. A group of 11 experimenters viewed all three tapes and rated all 60 target persons for physical attractiveness on a 10-point scale bounded by the labels "Very attractive" and "Very unattractive."

Results

The research hypotheses were tested in each group of target persons. The physical attractiveness ratings were used to divide each group into the 10 most and 10 least attractive. Correlated *t*-tests were used to compare the trait favorability scores of the two attractiveness groups and their ratings for looking like a leader, comfortable, attractive and competent. The results, shown in Table 2, varied across the groups. For Group 1, they were perfectly consistent with the hypotheses, as attractive targets received more favorable attributions and were judged to seem more like leaders and more comfortable, attractive, and competent. For Group 3, more attractive targets received more favorable attributions and were judged more attractive and competent. There was also a marginally significant trend for Group 3 targets to be judged to look more like leaders. For Group 2, however, there were no significant differences between attractive and unattractive targets.

In further analyses, Pearson correlation coefficients were

used to assess the relationships between attractiveness and each of the ratings. The results, shown in Table 3, are consistent with the comparisons reported above. For Groups 1 and 3, every rating measure correlated significantly with attractiveness, in the predicted direction. Higher levels of target attractiveness were associated with more favorable attributions and higher ratings for looking like a leader and comfortable, attractive, and competent. For Group 2, none of the five ratings correlated significantly with attractiveness.

Discussion

If the three groups of target persons examined in the present study are considered independent replications, then the research hypotheses received considerable support in two, but none in the third. In Groups 1 and 3, more attractive subjects performed better as leadership candidates in the simulation task, making more favorable impressions, seeming more like leaders, and appearing more comfortable, attractive, and competent as they gave the role-played campaign speech. For those two groups, there is evidence that more attractive individuals are better able to gain support as leadership candidates. For Group 2, however, no such evidence was found, perhaps because they were an anomalous sample.

The positive findings in the present study provide some indication of the mechanisms by which appearance may become a strong correlate of leadership status. While there was already some general evidence of a relationship between physical attractiveness and social skill (e.g., Cherulnik, Neely,

Flanagan, and Zachau, 1978), the present study goes farther in establishing a link between physical attractiveness and attraction toward a candidate for leadership. Future research might also examine the specific behaviors that are used by attractive leadership candidates to elicit supportive attributions from others.

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Table 1

Checklist Trait Adjectives

With Favorability Scale Values

Adjective	Scale Value
Nervous	196
Intelligent	537
Dishonest	41
Relaxed	439
Shy	291
Trustworthy	539
Indifferent	202
Amusing	460
Insecure	198
Frank	450
Bold	336
Confident	401

Table 2

Means for Subject Ratings of
High and Low Attractive Targets

Rating	Group 1(n=12)		Group 2(n=12)		Group 3(n=6)	
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Trait favorability	2368.01	2109.55*	2182.85	2311.82	2253.26	2057.67*
Looks like leader	46.09	36.19*	36.82	33.50	39.98	33.66**
Comfortable	44.91	37.38*	34.68	30.45	41.81	37.32
Attractive	43.04	32.75*	38.50	34.27	42.97	32.82*
Competent	40.25	34.34*	34.58	33.00	43.48	33.97*

* $t>1.73$, $p<.05$(df=18, 1-tailed test)

** $t>1.33$, $p<.10$(df=18, 1-tailed test)

Table 3

Correlations of Subject Ratings
With Experimenter-Rated Attractiveness
($df=18$, $r_{.05}=.44$, 1-tailed)

Rating	Target Group		
	1	2	3
Trait favorability	.54	-.29	.60
Looks like leader	.70	-.12	.80
Comfortable	.55	-.05	.87
Attractive	.48	-.03	.61
Competent	.77	-.01	.51